

Multimodal discourse analysis of ecotourism destinations' websites

Janita Tauriainen  
Master's Thesis  
English  
Faculty of Humanities  
University of Oulu  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines ecotourism destinations' websites, focusing particularly on the linguistic and visual elements utilised. The research questions are (1) how environmental sustainability is represented and (2) how nature is depicted on the destinations' websites. The data consist of four ecotourism destinations' websites and the principles of qualitative research are applied in the analysis. The main research method used is multimodal discourse analysis.

Ecotourism destinations are dedicated to sustainability. According to the destinations' websites, the dedication is sometimes visible already in the building stage, as some destinations have built their facilities around the trees to avoid cutting them and the walkways in the premises are usually elevated in order to minimise the damage that might occur on the ground level as a result of tourism. Sustainability lies in the core of ecotourism destinations' operation and the destinations have the responsibility of spreading knowledge about the environmental issues and how organisations and individuals can help combat them. The ecotourism destinations analysed in this thesis have developed several programmes regarding environmental education and allow scientific research to be performed in their premises.

A look into the destinations' websites highlights the significance of nature in all ecotourism destinations examined, as they primarily depict nature as the ideal environment for the search for personal tranquillity and balance. Ecotourism destinations seem to construct themselves as experiences, varying from active sports experiences to the individual's pursuit for mental balance and relaxation. That is, the experience does not necessarily refer to an activity based experience; instead, the effect on mental wellbeing is often highlighted on the websites, enabling the tourists to take in the surrounding nature, relax and let go of the stress of the everyday. Eco-friendly accommodations, in particular, seem to prioritise atmosphere over activity, as they are represented as places of relaxation and serenity.

## TIIVISTELMÄ

Tässä tutkielmassa analysoidaan ekoturismikohteita keskittyen siihen, millaisena ja miten ympäristöystävällinen kestävä kehitys kuvataan ja millaisena luonto esitetään kohteiden nettisivuilla. Tutkimusmateriaalina toimivat neljän ekoturismikohteen nettisivut ja tutkielma on toteutettu laadullisen tutkimuksen ja multimodaalisen diskurssianalyysin menetelmiä käyttäen.

Ekoturismikohteet ovat omistautuneita kestäväälle kehitykselle. Nettisivujen tarkastelu osoittaa, kuinka ympäristöystävälliset toimintamallit tulevat esille jo rakennusvaiheessa, sillä osa kohteista on välttänyt puiden hakkuuta rakentamalla puiden ympärille ja kohotetuilla kävelyreiteillä pyritään minimoimaan turismin aiheuttamat maanpintaan kohdistuvat vahingot. Kestävä kehitys on ekoturismikohteiden toiminnan ydin, ja kohteilla on vastuu levittää tietoa ympäristöongelmista ja tavoista, joilla yritykset ja yksilöt voivat auttaa niiden selvittämisessä. Tutkielmassa analysoiduissa ekoturismikohteissa suoritetaan monenlaisia tieteellisiä tutkimuksia ja kohteet ovat kehittäneet useita ohjelmia ympäristökasvatukseen liittyen.

Tutkimustulokset korostavat luonnon merkitystä kaikille tutkimusmateriaalina käytetyille ekoturismikohteille, sillä kohteet kuvaavat luontoa ideaalina ympäristönä henkilökohtaisen tasapainon ja tyyneyden etsimiselle. Tutkielma osoittaa ekoturismikohteiden esittelevän itsensä kokonaisvaltaisina kokemuksina, jotka vaihtelevat aktiivisista urheilukokemuksista yksilön henkisen tasapainon ja rentoutumisen tavoitteluun. Kokemus itsessään ei kuitenkaan välttämättä viittaa aktiiviseen tekemiseen, vaan nettisivuilla korostetaan usein kokemusta ympäristön psyykkisestä vaikutuksesta, jonka ansiosta turistit voivat rentoutua luonnon keskellä ja irrottautua arkielämän kiireestä ja stressistä. Erityisesti ekomajoituskohteet korostavat tunnelman merkitystä enemmän kuin aktiviteetteja, sillä ekomajoitukset kuvataan ideaaleina ympäristöinä henkisen tasapainon ja harmonian löytymiselle.

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## 1 Introduction

“Tourism from its inception to the end involves language, and starts mentally” (Mahadi et al., 2011). The tourism industry is highly dependent on the creation of mental visualisations, as the promotional materials, such as websites and brochures, are constructed to convey vague, yet surprisingly specific, ideas of what can be expected of the destination. Mental tourism, as presented by Mahadi et al. (2011), is the crucial first step that awakens the reader’s desire to travel to a particular destination. In the thesis, the construction of these mental visualisations will be explored through the analysis of ecotourism destinations’ websites. By definition, ecotourism focuses on the wellbeing of the environment, which is what influenced the research questions of this thesis: (1) How is environmental sustainability represented and (2) how is nature depicted on ecotourism destinations’ websites?

Ecotourism is a specific form of tourism. Already in 1991, the International Ecotourism Society defined ecotourism as travel to areas that take responsibility for the environmental contributions of tourism and try to lessen the industry’s negative impact on the locals (Wood, 2002), both of which are significant factors in the development of sustainable practices in the field of tourism. Previous studies have been able to establish tourists’ desire to find more environmentally friendly alternatives in their travels, which is why they are increasingly seeking destinations that have acknowledged sustainable practices in their operation (see e.g., Hall, 2014). Therefore, it might benefit the entire tourism industry if the expectations and the changing global values of tourists were acknowledged in promotional materials and the destinations’ operations were developed accordingly.

Previous studies on nature discourse have been largely focused on the relationship between nature and humans. Kvidal-Røvik (2018) found that the way the world is perceived is influenced by the way that nature is articulated in the media, while Qiu (2013) found that in addition to providing accommodation and food to consume, eco-hotels tend to favour sustainable practices and offer environmental education to their guests by definition. The topic of this thesis might be placed somewhere in between the two aforementioned studies, as the analysis explores the nature discourse on ecotourism destinations’ and ecotourism accommodation providers’ websites, while also discussing their sustainable operation based on the information given on their promotional material.

The significance of mental tourism becomes apparent when it comes to the promotional material, such as websites. Mahadi et al. (2011) see tourism as a circle: it requires effort before, during, and after the visit to the destination, after which it starts from the beginning. The idea of mental tourism is that the linguistic features should be carefully considered in order to make the destination appear

attractive enough through mental visualisation for the prospective visitor to want to experience it in reality (Mahadi et al., 2011). The significance of mental tourism presents a need for more research on the current expectations and values of tourists, as well as on how those values are present in tourism destinations' operations and promotional materials. The promotional material enables ecolinguistics to explore the vocabulary and semiotics of the ecotourism industry in detail to find out what kind of vocabulary is used to influence behavioural change towards more environmentally friendly alternatives. This thesis focuses on the representations conveyed by the language and visual elements. Therefore, the analysis has been conducted as a qualitative, multimodal discourse analysis.

Four ecotourism destinations, chosen by the author, were examined strictly on the basis of their websites. The approaches to the sustainable practices taken by the destinations will be compared and assessed and nature's significance will be discussed. The analysis of the websites shows how ecotourism destinations can be constructed as personalised experiences to attract more visitors, while the eco-friendly accommodation organisations are often established as quiet, fairy-tale-like places for relaxation and wellbeing. Nature has a significant role in all of the ecotourism destinations examined in this thesis, and the findings show that while ecotourism destinations often talk about nature as a fairy-tale-like setting for a holiday, nature is viewed inherently as a healing environment that detoxifies the tourists from their everyday stress at home. In addition to being a place of serenity for people, the findings show how nature is depicted as having indispensable communal value, as it is used for medicinal purposes and scientific research on a number of different fields.

The thesis begins with an introduction of the theoretical framework, including brief discussions on previous research on topics such as ecotourism and mental tourism. The theory section continues with the establishment of the research approach, followed by the introductions of the ecotourism destinations whose websites have been examined in the analysis. The analysis is divided into four parts, beginning with the exploration of the ways in which destinations build themselves up as experiences. The second section focuses on the aspect of environmentally friendly practices by discussing how sustainability is represented on the destinations' websites. The third section sheds light on eco-accommodations, specifically, and acknowledges the combination of luxurious living and sustainable operation. The atmosphere conveyed by the eco-accommodations' websites is also explored in the same section. The fourth section of the analysis focuses entirely on nature, as its role on the websites and for ecotourism in general are discussed. Possible limitations of the analysis and suggestions for further research can be found in the conclusion.

## **2 Theoretical framework**

Tourism is a concept that is seemingly easy, but surprisingly difficult to define accurately. Generally speaking, tourism is a form of voluntary travel for the purpose of leisure and pleasure, the main factor being that the traveller is going to return to their home country after a period of time. Although the length of stay is usually up to 12 months, there are differences between countries as to how long a person can stay and still be categorised as a tourist (Hall, 2014). Ecotourism is a subgenre of tourism, a more sustainable alternative of travel, which will be defined in more detail in the following section. After that, previous research will be presented and the characteristics of an ecotourist will be discussed in order to find out what kind of people the marketing of ecotourism destinations should be aimed at.

### **2.1 Defining ecotourism**

As the name suggests, ecotourism is one of the many forms of tourism. Some researchers and tourism organizations agree that, broadly speaking, tourism consists of activities where people leave their everyday surroundings, either for business, pleasure or any other reason, for a period of time that does not exceed a year (World Tourism Organization, as cited in Mani, 2015). Now, as previously mentioned, ecotourism is a specific form of tourism. The foundations of ecotourism can be found in environmentally friendly options relating to travel and tourism. As such, researchers in the field have different views on what ecotourism entails, which is why it is necessary to clarify the definition used in this thesis. Gilbert (2003) has provided a relatively general definition that successfully sums up the viewpoint that will be discussed throughout:

Ecotourism is a family of tourist experiences and programs which are motivated by interest in authentic environments and a desire to promote environmental sensitivity, conducted in ways that respect the integrity of the areas visited, and which may promote environmental and social causes in those areas.  
(p. 75)

Ecotourism is a concept that is increasingly of interest to researchers from different fields, prominently business and environmental studies. Due to the large number of studies conducted on climate change and tourism, it is natural that there are different ways of defining ecotourism. Some

researchers recognize ecotourism as a subgenre of sustainable tourism. For example, Wood (2002) emphasises ecotourism's aspiration to achieve sustainability by stating that sustainability should be the focus of the planning of tourism infrastructure. Additionally, Wood highlights that these aspirations should not be limited to ecotourism destinations only. Rather, all tourism related activities should strive to be as sustainable as possible and, hence, the marketing should also focus on sustainability criteria, covering the environmental, social, cultural and economic contexts. However, there are differences. On one hand, according to Wood (2002), ecotourism should be sustainable, but as Cater and Cater (2015) point out, it does not mean that all sustainable tourism is ecotourism. On the other hand, some researchers have chosen not to differentiate explicitly between sustainable tourism and ecotourism.

Solutions for the environmental issues caused by the industry have been researched with varying results. For instance, one response to the issue of greenhouse gas emissions caused by tourist mobility is the so called 'slow travel movement'. This refers to a proposition of a reduction of air and car travel, as well as travelling smaller distances. Dickinson et al. (2010) conducted a qualitative study on the slow travel movement, in which discourses of both slow and non-slow travellers were analysed. The analysis concluded that slow travel does, in fact, have the potential to reduce tourism industry's overall carbon footprint (Dickinson et al., 2010). Another study on slow travel, conducted by Guiver and MacGrath (2016), examined both academic literature and websites that are targeted at tourists. Guiver and MacGrath (2016) focused on the activities offered at the destination, whereas the previous study Dickinson et al. (2010) discussed mobility in particular. Guiver and MacGrath (2016) define slow tourism as reducing "the pace of activity, by savouring each activity in its own right, rather than seeing it as the means to an end" (p. 14). Their study contrasted the emphases between the two publishing formats and found that while academic literature often emphasises the benefits of slow travel to the tourism destination and to global sustainability, websites tend to focus on the personal, individual benefits for the tourists, focusing on slow tourism. The findings suggest that the way both academic literature and websites talk about slow tourism, although with different emphases, highlights the tourists' right to make their own decision based on their own interests, without being too pressuring (Guiver & MacGrath, 2016). Guiver and MacGrath (2016) also discussed the preferred activities for slow tourism. For example, they found that a slow tourist most probably prefers an untouched, rural area for accommodation, and does remarkably less sightseeing than mass tourists. The focus is on quality rather than quantity, and they are motivated to connect with the foreign place and its residents. Slow tourism eliminates the rush and stress of trying to get the most out of a large area, and instead creates a connection between the tourist and the place they are visiting by slowing



them down, encouraging spontaneity, and creating a relaxed home away from home (Guiver & MacGrath, 2016).

Despite environmentally friendly tourism seemingly being nothing but a positive concept, it does come with issues and controversies, and is thus not as easily applicable as it may seem. Cater and Cater (2015) examined these controversial issues through the Quebec Declaration. Briefly introduced, the Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism is a set of principles that refine ecotourism. The declaration is the result of a meeting between over 3000 representatives from multiple organisations at the World Ecotourism Summit in Quebec City in 2002. The document is meant to present a set of guidelines that would further advance and develop the ecotourism industry (Quebec Declaration). The Quebec Declaration consists of four main principles: active engagement, inclusivity, educative, small scale (Cater & Cater, 2015). Briefly described, active engagement refers to the fact that ecotourism should actively participate in the conservation of not only the environment but also culture. The aspect of active contribution is one of the factors that separate ecotourism from the broader field of sustainable tourism. The principle of inclusivity recognises the local and indigenous communities and insists that they should be included in tourism planning and development, and the communities should benefit from ecotourism socially, economically and environmentally. The educative principle highlights the importance of educating the visitors about both environmental and cultural heritage in the area. Educating visitors can help the tourists understand the value of sustainability and influence their behaviour. Last but not least, the principle of small scale refers to the industry's preference of keeping the visitor numbers small (Cater & Cater, 2015). The principles may seem plausible in theory, but a closer inspection reveals the controversies that appear in practice. These controversies seem to mostly stem from the failure to abide by the principles. For instance, locals are rarely included enough in the processes and the benefits rarely reach them the way intended. Researchers suggest that the fact that these issues exist is not to say ecotourism is at fault: there is simply a gap between theory and practice. For instance, in regards to small scale, some destinations offer activities that are more environmentally friendly for larger groups. One example given of such an activity might be whale watching (Cater & Cater, 2015). That said, Cater and Cater (2015) offer two factors that affect this gap between theory and practice:

The first is the failure to recognize the wider context in which ecotourism is set as a process; the second is that its 'sexiness' as a concept has meant that, either through a failure to understand or blatant opportunism, ecotourism has frequently been misinterpreted, misappropriated, and misdirected. (p. 107)

Finally, the same study also acknowledges the issue of ethnocentric bias, referring to the fact that because ecotourism is a Western construct, it cannot be expected to be applicable as such on a global scale (Cater & Cater, 2015).

## **2.2 Targeting ecotourists**

“On the whole, the difficult thing about persuasion is to know the mind of the person one is trying to persuade and to be able to fit one’s words to it” (Han Fei Tzu, as cited in Hall, 2014, p. 128). Therefore, in order to understand tourism marketing and for it to be as efficient as possible in influencing change of behaviour, it is important to first examine the reasons why people travel in the first place and what kind of criteria they have in choosing the destinations. According to Hall (2014), travellers are increasingly looking for low-impact mobility alternatives as well as environmental awareness and sensitivity from the destinations. Moreover, a study conducted by Sowards (2012) focuses on understanding ecotourists’ vision, in particular, of their environmental selves and the way they interact with locals. According to Sowards, the study of the expectations and experiences that are formed in the field of ecotourism is significant in developing the relationships between all parties involved in the tourism industry, including tourists, locals, and businesses, while also improving conservation in the area (Sowards, 2012). She suggests that tourist experiences are characterised by the combination of expectations and memories. That is, expectations create a certain vision of what the tourist is hoping to get from the experience, and “it is when experiences exceed or disappoint that we have possibilities for transformation in how we perceive of ourselves, others, and the environment” (Sowards, 2012, p. 177). The study essentially focuses on the importance of memories, and how they shape the tourist’s environmental self, which apparently happens particularly when the tourist is confronted about their own environmental contributions (Sowards, 2012). The study also suggests that taking home souvenirs, for example, is the tourists’ way of remembering the experiences that they have and also a way of showing their traveller’s identity, part of their environmental self, to others.

Sowards also concludes that while a counterexperience, the complete opposite of one’s own everyday life, is usually what a tourist is after, the ecotourist is often also looking for the exotic, for a place that not many people have set foot in and where the local lifestyle is completely different from their own (Sowards, 2012). Ecotourism destinations are often expected to be significantly less crowded than regular tourism destinations, located on more remote areas and occupied by communities of diverse

cultures, which shapes the ecotourist's expectations. "The ecotourist almost by definition seeks adventure and counterexperience" (Sowards, 2012, p. 182).

### **2.3 Marketing and sustainability**

Additionally, the marketing of sustainability and the paradox that inevitably comes with it have also been studied previously. Barr et al. (2010), for instance, examined this by conducting an empirical research of the marketing of sustainable lifestyles as a "tool for encouraging pro-environmental behaviour" (p. 712). The research also acknowledges that while environmental issues have been increasingly recognised on local and regional scales, emphasis has been put on individuals and their potential to make a change in the past decade (Barr et al., 2010). Other researchers have also examined the same topic. For example, Hall (2014) focuses specifically on social marketing and seems to agree that social marketing can be used to encourage sustainable behaviour among the tourism industry, in both individuals and businesses. Studies have also shown that tourists increasingly choose to include environmentally friendly developments and low-impact mobility in their criteria when choosing a destination (Hall, 2014). This means that it would be beneficial for the tourism destinations to market themselves as environmentally sensitive.

However, marketing a travel destination as environmentally sensitive presents a controversy. As the study conducted by Barr et al. (2010) finds, there is a conflict between using environmental responsibility and sustainable consumption as marketing tools while the discourse regarding consumption from the perspective of climate change is largely focused on the reduction of consumption altogether. Hall (2014) explains that promoting green alternatives and developments in the travel destinations can be seen as "a form of anti-consumption consumption" (p. 227). This is simply another name to the paradox of marketing more sustainable consumption when the aim should be on reducing consumption altogether. Hall (2014) also notices a similar controversy between what is discussed in theory and what is done in practice when it comes to sustainability. That is, in the tourism industry many destinations promote more sustainable consumption and ethical alternatives on one hand but continue to increase their target for the number of visitors every year on the other (Hall, 2014). The issue of visitor numbers has received different suggestions, as some researchers prefer the so called "high-value, low-volume" model when it comes to tourist groups (Sandbrook, 2010). In other words, according to the model the destinations should value tourists that spend more time and money in the area instead of taking in high numbers of tourists that spend little money and

stay for a couple of days at best. Conversely, some researchers argue that the visitor number in and of itself is not the issue, but rather the issue lies in how carefully the destinations are prepared to manage the increasing numbers, some even arguing that “a greater number of tourists with appropriate facilities, such as sewerage treatment, will have less of a negative impact on the environment than a smaller number of tourists without such facilities” (Weaver, 1999, as cited in Wood & Glasson, 2005, p. 400).

Another issue has been recognised by Lansing and De Vries (2007), who discuss in their article whether sustainable tourism is a valid, environmentally friendly alternative to conventional mass tourism, for example, or if it is simply a marketing technique that the tourism destinations use to attract the tourists that are more knowledgeable about tourism’s impact on the environment. They conclude that, at least at the time, sufficient proof of the theoretical influence of sustainable tourism working in practice does not exist. That is, in their view sustainable tourism is reduced to a marketing technique that does not deliver its promises. They also agree with Sharpley (2000), suggesting that rather than focusing on environmentally sustainable tourism, the focus seems to be on sustaining tourism as an industry (Sharpley, 2000, as cited in Lansing & De Vries, 2007). Whether the same accusation pertains to the ecotourism industry is out of scope of this thesis, but it would make an interesting topic for further analysis.

Even though social marketing is not usually considered a theory on its own (Hall, 2014), its significance to the ecological aspects of the tourism industry cannot go unnoticed in the context of this thesis. Social marketing aims to change social behaviour in people, groups, and businesses. That is, the foundation of social marketing lies in the idea that changing any behaviour requires more than words and regulations. The focus must be on building attractive choices that lead the consumers to make better decisions in terms of sustainability, for example, for the benefit of not only the individual but also for the society (Hall, 2014). Despite the controversial discussions surrounding it, social marketing has been able to gain credibility in the academic world, as it has been recognised as an influencing factor in social change rather than simply a way to promote ideas. Still, very little research exists combining social marketing and tourism, even though already in the 1970s researches highlighted the importance of the organisations’ significance of being customer oriented and changing the focus from cost reduction to understanding the significance of ecological interdependence (Hall, 2014).

Social marketing can be as simple as putting up signs to promote behavioural changes. For instance, a sign at the beach advises people not to leave trash lying around, or a small paper taped on a printer

reminds people to refrain from printing unnecessary amounts and printing double-sided whenever possible in order to save paper. These are small, easily applicable ways for companies to promote environmental sustainability. And if the easiness and the environmental aspect are not enough motivation on their own, these changes are often cost-effective for the company as well. This is part of the attractiveness: there is nothing to lose when the benefits are noticeable and the costs minimal (Andreasen, 2002, as cited in Hall, 2014).

## **2.4 Mental tourism**

Mental tourism, armchair tourism (Nelson, 2005), or linguistic tourism, all refer to the use of language found on tourism brochures and websites that has a purpose of attracting new visitors by using highly descriptive words to inspire mental images in the readers' eyes and help them visualise themselves at the destination. That is, mental tourism is the first step – and arguably the most influential one – on the journey towards choosing a holiday destination (Mahadi et al., 2011).

The language used in tourism brochures and websites is similar to the language of advertisements, which makes sense considering their fundamental goal of attracting more visitors to a particular destination. It requires consideration and careful selection of words to have the desired effect without being too elaborate. Moreover, the language should be able to catch the attention of diverse groups of tourists with different interests in order to increase visitor numbers. “Linguistic tourism precedes real tourism” (Mahadi et al., 2011), which seems to suggest that the natural course of action begins by finding out about a destination, visiting the area by using one's imagination and ultimately booking a holiday in real life. Furthermore, according to a study by Mahadi et al. (2011), the act of tourism ought to be seen as a circle instead of a direct line. That is, tourism requires effort before, during, and after the visit, and it does not stop at the end but rather starts from the beginning again. The linguistic features have a pivotal role in making the mental visit alluring enough for the reader to want to experience it in reality. This is why they are considered an important aspect for the tourism industry: making the destination as attractive as possible by using linguistic features is a crucial step “towards achieving real tourism” (Mahadi et al., 2011). According to Mahadi et al. (2011), pictures and other stylistic choices are often used to either emphasise or clarify the meaning of the accompanying text, while the text itself is often relaxed and conversational to make it more easily approachable and closer to the reader. Pictures can be added for different purposes: they might include symbolic figures to clarify instructions, for instance, or they might be there to amplify the effect of the written text on the

page. Texts are often bursting with adjectives and they require effort from the reader in order to affect them as desired, whereas pictures are quick and easy for the mind to read. They make mental tourism easier by helping with visualisation. In some cases, pictures might simply be added for the sake of catching people's attention (Mahadi et al., 2011). Whatever the purpose might be, the combined effect of the linguistic features and images is of most importance.

## **2.5 Nature discourse and tourism**

While a lot of research on tourism's effects and impacts on the environment seems to focus on the negatives, Wood and Glasson (2005) emphasise the positives, including the economic benefits that tourism often provides for local communities.

Tourism has the potential to destroy natural areas, 'loving them to death'.... Yet, this need not be the case. Tourism can also give a voice to natural areas, by giving them a value (however partial), and this voice can play a significant transformational role in the debate on the use and management of such areas. (Wood & Glasson, 2005, p. 406)

The economic value may be overlooked, as it is not always directly measurable in numbers. However, the impacts on nature are also a point of interest in the study, and it seems that the tourism industry's effect on the environment is dependent on the management plan of the destination and its surrounding nature. That is, the better the management plan for tourism development, the less likely it is that the environment suffers from considerable negative impacts due to tourism (Wood & Glasson, 2005). These negative impacts often stem from the increasing visitor numbers and the pressure that it puts on the environment. However, Wood and Glasson (2005) suggest that the way the destination is managed and developed plays a much more significant role in the environment's wellbeing than visitor numbers, as proper management helps with minimising the negative impacts.

It seems that previous research on nature discourse has been largely focused on the climate change perspective. However, Kvidal-Røvik (2018) conducted a study in which Norwegian television advertisements were examined to find out "how nature is articulated in public discourse" and "how humans' relationship to nature is constructed via such articulations" (p. 794). The idea behind the

study was that the definition of nature is not as straightforward as it may seem, but rather it is always influenced by context and the way in which it is articulated, which essentially means that the way in which nature is articulated also affects the way that the world is perceived: “mediated texts ... help shape our experience, relationship, interactions, understanding and knowledge, hence influencing political debates and decision-making” (Kvidal-Røvik, 2018, p. 796). Four patterns of articulation were recognised in the examined advertisements: deification, appropriation, domination, and internalisation. In short, deification considers nature as a sacred entity that has healing powers and exists to save people from the busyness of their everyday city lives. Appropriation transforms nature into a commodity, into an entity that is accessible through consumption. Domination highlights the caretaking characteristic by depicting nature as something that can be consumed in bigger portions without the need to destroy any of it. Domination requires individual effort, as the consumer needs to be willing to leave nature as pristine as it was and remember to recycle. The internalising pattern seemed to be most rare in Norwegian advertisements, but it refers to nature being something that is in/on the body, either through consumption or by definition (Kvidal-Røvik, 2018). It seems that all four patterns have shared characteristics: for example, in all patterns nature is depicted as the Other. It is purposely separated from humans and has an almost sacred character to it. As advertisements, they also encourage the consumption of nature in one way or another, while also aiming to create an undeniable bond between nature and Norwegianness. These discourses are not without controversy, as the marketing aspect is naturally dominant in advertisements: discourses are often “disparate and sometimes conflicting” as they “are *rhetorically configured and aligned* in ways that benefit a global market economy” (Kvidal-Røvik, 2018, p. 803, emphasis in original). The study highlights how the way in which nature is articulated and defined has an effect on the general public, and how knowledge of these articulation patterns can be used in an attempt to influence individual consumer behaviour. “Our knowledge and social practises are structured *through* discourse” (Kvidal-Røvik, 2018, p. 796, emphasis in original), and “the way we see and understand nature has consequences for how we relate to climate change” (p. 802) and the environment in general.

A study conducted by Qiu (2013) examined eco-hotel profiles, in particular, for their linguistic features, the ecological thoughts evoked through the language, and the social context that may have led to the environmental aspect. Essentially, the idea in eco-accommodation in general is that the hotel does not only offer a bed to sleep in and food to consume, but also highlights environmental sensitivity and has the means to educate the visitors on environmental awareness. Qiu (2013) attempts to provide a comprehensive view on the relationship between language, nature and society: the processes chosen for the eco-hotel profiles often project the views of the writer(s) behind the text, as

the writer's perspectives and attitudes are visible through linguistic emphases. According to Qiu (2013), eco-hotel profiles are often constructed using mostly material and relational processes which refer to the ways in which the discourse is focused on "the informing, promoting and persuading functions" (p. 1881). Specifically, relational process refers to the act of providing a detailed description of the features and environmental actions that set the destination apart from other hotels and enable the eco-hotel to provide quality accommodation while ensuring minimal impact on the environment. Material process covers the equipment that is needed for a quality accommodation, as well as providing information and education on environmental issues for the prospective visitors. Additionally, mental and existential processes are also used on eco-hotel profiles. That is, the prospective visitors' feelings are taken into account through the description of the often exotic and unique experience that the destination is able to offer (Qiu, 2013).

The different processes function as tools to inspire ecological thoughts (Qiu, 2013). For instance, from the eco-hotel's perspective it is important to act according to their own principles in order to set an example for the visitors, to show them that the environmentally sensitive actions they are promoting are easily approachable and minimal impact is achievable. All of this should be visible on the hotel's profile. From the visitor's point of view, on the other hand, the guests have the ability to enjoy the serenity and peace by staying at the eco-hotel. This is often the result of the hotel emphasising the idea that humans are/should be one with nature: according to Qiu (2013), it is essential to understand that "self-realization relies on the well being of all the other existences in the ecosystem" as they "can direct human to preserve nature actively so as to achieve harmonious co-existence with nature" (Lei Yi, 2001, as quoted in Qiu, 2013, p. 1883). The fundamental idea is that language is an essential tool in the construction of reality when it comes to the relationship between humans and nature, and Qiu (2013) further highlights this by stating that "only when we [as] human beings interact and identify with nature ... can we realize the true meanings of life and gain the simplistic happiness of life" (p. 1883), which seems almost a philosophical perspective on nature and environmental protection. It seems that the eco-hotels are often pursuing the idea of a life that appears simplistic but is very diverse spiritually, as eco-hotels seem to emphasise also "enriching the guests' spiritual ethos, instead of merely advertising material comforts as hotel profiles generally [do]" (Qiu, 2013, p. 1884). Essentially, this spirituality seems to refer to seeing the hotel as a place of relaxation and an escape from the 'real world' that is the busy everyday life at home. The eco-hotel is nature-oriented by definition, which in turn emphasises the visitors "harmonious relationship with nature" (Qiu, 2013, p. 1884), where nature can be seen as a spiritual healer.



Naturally, there is a more business-oriented perspective available for discussion. That is, Qiu (2013) presents the idea that by educating its visitors on environmental sensitivity and the protection of the surrounding nature, the eco-hotel is essentially ensuring that the visitors know about the hotel's environmental contributions and that they are doing their best in minimising the negative impacts. It is also suggested that it might be because of the global threat of climate change that the hotel owners are voluntarily applying more environmentally friendly alternatives to their operation, as by doing so they are catching the attention of a wider audience and also gaining a more positive reputation among ecologically aware tourists, which is fundamentally the goal of every profitable organisation (Qiu, 2013).

Nelson (2005) conducted a study focusing on the representation of nature as an other. In other words, tourism promotion materials often purposely picture nature as an entity completely separate from humans and their hurried lives. In spite of the fact that different tourist groups naturally appreciate different aspects of travelling, nature is usually pictured as a relaxing environment where people can admire the beautiful landscapes without needing to worry about their hectic lives back home. The otherness is most visible in the contrasts used in the marketing materials: in addition to the contrast between the stressful life at home and the relaxing atmosphere of the forest, an interesting one is the differentiation between what is natural – authentic – and what is artificial. Nelson (2005) adds that because tourism relies highly on visualisation, the promotion materials are carefully selected to match the ideal state of the destination that the Western tourists, in particular, expect to see. In doing so, the destination and its surrounding nature are seen as “both a context for consumption and a consumable product itself” (p. 131), and the websites and brochures advertising the destination have become increasingly significant in representing the destination's identity. However, it should be noted that the destination's identity presented for the tourists may differ from the one familiar to the locals (Nelson, 2005). In other words, the promotional materials are carefully conducted to meet the tourists' expectations in a way that will match what the destination is able to offer, regardless of whether that is the authentic way of living for the locals or not.

### **3 Research approach**

The framework chosen for the thesis is partially influenced by Kachel and Jennings's (2009) proposed research agenda for studies related to tourists' environmental values and experiences, in particular. Kachel and Jennings suggest that the research approach taken should be qualitative in order to help in understanding how and why tourists change their environmental outlook and what could be improved within the tourism industry to promote environmental awareness and sensitivity among travellers to help them make more sustainable decisions. Kachel and Jennings (2009) also propose that a postmodern constructivist paradigm would be suitable for this kind of research, because it keeps all views and interpretations equally valid (Kachel & Jennings, 2009).

#### **3.1 Postmodern constructivist paradigm**

This section is dedicated to a brief introduction of a constructivist paradigm and transformative research, both of which are a significant part of the methodology used in the analysis. The chosen approach was inspired by Kachel and Jennings (2009), who suggest that a postmodern constructivist paradigm would be the most suitable option for the studies conducted in the field of tourism, specifically when discussing tourist behaviour and tourists' environmental values.

A paradigm consists of ontology, epistemology and methodology. For a constructivist paradigm, the ontology is relativist, which means that there are several possible realities. The epistemology is subjectivist, which refers to the understandings created between the participants. The methodologies applied in the constructivist paradigm are naturalistic, set in the natural world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, as cited in Lee, 2011). To Neimeyer and Torres (2015), constructivism is not in the methods or techniques that are used, but rather in the philosophy behind the technique. That is, the aim is to create "universally 'true' or valid categories for human experience", it "considers knowledge to be the production of social and personal processes of meaning making" and it is often "more concerned with the viability of pragmatic utility of its application than with its validity per se" (Neimeyer & Torres, 2015, p. 724). This makes sense in the context of climate change and environmental studies as well. Because of the abstract nature of climate change, the constructivist paradigm is often used to make it more easily approachable as a concept. That is, instead of concentrating on spreading awareness of the facts, the actions that can be taken towards mitigating climate change and the benefits that come with these actions are often put first (Sedlacek, 2017).

The research approach might also be seen as transformative. As Conti and Counter (1991) explain, transformative research is used to address social problems by spreading awareness of an issue in the society. Some problems have already been and will be addressed in the following sections, but it should be noted that the main emphasis throughout this thesis is on the constructivist paradigm.

### **3.2 Qualitative research**

Qualitative research is difficult to define clearly, as its researchers have not agreed on any theories or paradigms that would be distinctly considered part of qualitative research (Lee, 2011). The worthiness of qualitative research compared to quantitative research has often been overlooked in studies (Graham & Schuwerk, 2016), although its worth has been recognised in the linguistic field where it has essentially become the norm since the 1970s (Benson, 2012). The underestimation of qualitative research can be traced back to the fact that even though it consists of multiple research methodologies, qualitative research is often perceived as a one separate, somewhat abstract concept, which makes it an easy target for criticism (Lee, 2011). However, despite the comparisons between qualitative and quantitative methodologies, it is important to realize that there are some types of knowledge that can only be reached through qualitative research (Graham & Schuwerk, 2016).

While the majority of research related to environmental impacts and values has been conducted using a quantitative approach, Kachel and Jennings (2009) suggest in their research agenda that the main approach for future research in the field should be a qualitative one. They explain their proposition by saying that the questions should be formulated in a way that will help us to better understand *how* and *why*. That is, while quantitative research often includes bigger sample sizes and reliable statistics, qualitative research allows for a deeper analysis by helping in understanding *why* people change their environmental behaviour, *when* and *how* their perceptions can be altered/influenced for the better (Kachel & Jennings, 2009). Therefore, the analysis will be conducted using a qualitative research method.

### 3.3 Multimodal discourse analysis

Communication has become increasingly multimodal, but critical discourse analysis still often focuses on speech and writing only (van Leeuwen, 2013). Moreover, because the gathered data will consist of websites, which naturally use visual aspects to their benefit at least as much as written language, the data will be analysed using multimodal discourse analysis. According to Jones (2013), multimodal discourse analysis is “an approach to discourse which focuses on how meaning is made through the use of multiple modes of communication as opposed to just language” (p. 1). That is, all modes of communication are taken into account equally, without emphasising speech and writing too much. The increasing interest in multimodality within the linguistic field is naturally the result of the development of technology, and its effect on the everyday lives of people (Jones, 2013). In the linguistic field, researchers have realised that in order to understand language the nonverbal communication needs to be recognised and taken into consideration in addition to the written; for example, in the case of websites the nonverbal communication may be in the form of images, typography or the overall layout of the information (van Leeuwen, 2013). More importantly, it should be highlighted that multimodal discourse does not refer to a specific kind of discourse that is being examined. On the contrary, it refers to the multitude of different modes that complement each other and add to the traditional discourse of speech and writing (Jones, 2013). The grammatical use of visual images is best exemplified in comics, where the written language may say one thing but the visual image proposes a completely different perspective that alters the meaning conveyed in the written.

Multimodal critical discourse analysis is often underestimated by the researchers themselves. The field of multimodality prefers to see multimodality in a more positive light, as an effective tool for communication (van Leeuwen, 2013). Therefore, the critical aspect might be mentioned briefly, or it might become evident in the short analyses and interpretations, but most likely it will not be the focus of the introduction. van Leeuwen (2013) emphasises the fact that multimodality is becoming increasingly common and, hence, is often taken for granted, which is why it needs more critical analyses (van Leeuwen, 2013). The internet is a prime example of a place that takes multimodality for granted, because the vast majority of webpages use different ways of communication, both written and visual. Thus, multimodality will also be visible in the analysis, as the websites are examined from a critical perspective.

As the analysis includes the examination of multimodal discourse, both language and visual elements will be analysed. The analysis was performed by exploring the websites one by one, taking note of

any features, textual or visual, that stood out or seemed to have a specific purpose of influencing the reader through eliciting mental visualisations or evoking a particular feeling. All extracts from the destinations' websites are presented in italics throughout the analysis. Pictures or screenshots of the websites are not included in the analysis due to possible copyright issues, but the examined websites are cited throughout the text as needed and URLs are included in the reference list at the end of the thesis. It should be noted that the analysis uses the versions of the websites available in 2020 and, as a result of the everchanging nature of websites, may differ from the current version. Nevertheless, the findings and discussions of the ways in which linguistic features and visual elements have been used on the websites remain valid even if the websites have been updated since.

## **4 Data**

Before getting into the analysis, the material and the criteria that were used in selecting the material will be introduced. The destinations and their websites for the analysis were chosen by the author. The websites were found through Google by using ‘ecotourism destination’ as search words. This led to a couple of blog posts about ecotourism destinations, which in turn inspired more accurate Google searches and resulted in finding specific destinations: only a couple of destinations were eliminated, mostly due to the obvious lack of attention paid to the destinations’ websites, and the suitable ones were found early on in the search. The chosen destinations seem to keep their websites and/or social media pages up to date and, thus, make suitable material for the analysis. Moreover, while most of the destinations are located not only in Australia but also within UNESCO World Heritage Areas, one of the destinations is located on the other side of the world in Costa Rica. This setting enables closer analysis on the similarities and differences between the destinations with similar circumstances in Australia, while also providing a possibility to examine cultural differences by comparing the Australian destinations with the Costa Rican. The chosen destinations are all part of the ecotourism industry, although they represent three different types of destinations: an interpretive centre, a biological reserve, and accommodation. These types will be discussed in more detail in the following section. The destinations, namely, Daintree Discovery Centre, Daintree Wilderness Lodge, The Canopy Treehouses and Wildlife Sanctuary, and Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve, will be briefly introduced next.

### **4.1 Daintree Discovery Centre**

The Daintree Discovery Centre is an ecotourism destination in the Daintree rainforest, in Far North Queensland, Australia. According to the Discovery Centre’s website, the Daintree rainforest is the oldest tropical rainforest in the world, the oldest part being estimated at over 150 million years old. Moreover, the rainforest is also listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Area (Daintree Discovery Centre), as it is considered home to “an unparalleled record of the ecological and evolutionary processes that shaped the flora and fauna of Australia” (UNESCO). The Discovery Centre has won multiple awards and it was entered into the Ecotourism Australia’s Hall of Fame in December 2019 for maintaining the ECO certification for 20 years. Established in 1989, the Discovery Centre turned 30 the same year they were entered into the Hall of Fame. According to the CEO of the Discovery Centre, ecotourism and the need to preserve the rainforest are at the core of their business, and they

have designed the walkways as sustainably as possible to protect the environment (Ralph, 2019a). As an interpretive facility, the Discovery Centre offers self-guided audio tours, guidebooks, walkways on multiple levels, trails, theatres and presentations on different species, among other activities. They promote endangered species that live in the rainforest, focusing especially on the Southern Cassowary which is a large bird species native to the Daintree rainforest. The Discovery Centre is perceived as *a premier ecotourism facility*, and they also contribute to climate change research with the Canopy Tower and Micrometeorological Weather Station (Daintree Discovery Centre).

#### **4.2 Daintree Wilderness Lodge**

The Daintree Wilderness Lodge, located in the Daintree National Park, also in the Daintree rainforest, Far North Queensland, Australia, is an exclusive accommodation provider with only seven cabins available for visitors, which are located individually to ensure complete privacy. According to their website, the Wilderness Lodge has received an Advanced Eco Certification for keeping environmental sensitivity as the focal point of the organisation's operation since the beginning of the building process. The Wilderness Lodge also operates with the environment and its habitants as their priority, which means that their principles do not allow them or their visitors to destroy any of the fauna in the area in any circumstances, including the generally less liked species, such as rats and insects (Daintree Wilderness Lodge). The Daintree Wilderness Lodge is one of the two main accommodation organisations examined in the analysis.

#### **4.3 The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary**

The Canopy Treehouses and Wildlife Sanctuary is an eco-certified luxury treehouse accommodation provider located in the middle of the rainforest in the Atherton Tablelands, Tropical North Queensland, Australia. Their location is also part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. According to the destination's website, there are five treehouses in total, all made of timber and glass and placed far enough from each other in order to guarantee complete privacy for their guests. The treehouses are all equipped with kitchens, spa baths, and barbecues on the balcony, and they are marketed as a home away from home, a perfect place for a family holiday far away from the busyness of everyday life. The activities in the area range from varied food markets to wildlife tours (The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary).

#### **4.4 Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve**

Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve is a privately owned reserve located in Monteverde, Costa Rica. The reserve was founded in 1975 by an ornithologist and a representative of the local Quaker community. The reserve began with a donation of some 320 hectares which was made the responsibility of the Tropical Science Center. The first numbers were reportedly some 470 visitors per year. The reserve has existed for 45 years now and, according to the reserve's website, the visitor numbers have risen to some 90 000, while an article suggests that the numbers might be closer to 250 000 (Monahan, 2004). Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve has gained recognition as a sustainable tourism destination, they have been awarded the Galardón de Bandera Azul (Blue Flag Award) in the category Natural Protected Areas, and they have the Certification of Sustainable Tourism. According to the destination's website, they are able to maintain their sustainable policies by using biodegradable products, ecological water-heaters, as well as prohibiting keeping animals in captivity, as well as dedicating their website mostly to strictly informing the visitors about the operation of the reserve as well as providing facts on various topics around sustainability and the environment (Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve). The Monteverde reserve also have a private accommodation, La Casona Lodge, which is located in the heart of the reserve.



## 5 Analysis

The destinations represent three different types: interpretive facility, biological reserve, and accommodation. All of the destinations are located in a rainforest, the majority of them in Australia and one in Costa Rica. The focus of the analysis will first be on the Australian interpretive facility and the Costa Rican biological reserve, as their approaches to constructing an experience for the visitor are examined and discussed, along with the issues that arise from these approaches. Then, in section 5.3, the focus will turn to the accommodation providers to examine what kind of atmosphere the websites convey and how it is achieved through language. Section 5.4 will focus more directly on the nature discourse on the ecotourism destinations' websites.

### 5.1 Ecotourism destination as an experience

The Daintree Discovery Centre is an ecotourism destination located in the Daintree rainforest in Australia. The Discovery Centre is an interpretive centre, which is as a place that focuses on providing information on a particular topic in order to help people understand it better (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a). In practice, this is accomplished by sharing the information using different media forms, including pictures, videos and a wide range of exhibitions (Collins, n.d.). At first glance, the Daintree Discovery Centre's website simulates a feeling of a dense forest, as the background is bursting with green plants and leaves. The effort that has been put in the visual aspect of the website with banners advertising the destination as *#1 Attraction in the Daintree* presents the Discovery Centre as not only a popular tourism destination but one with a clear mission towards ecological sensitivity and environmental protection, as the banner also includes an honorary mention of awards that the destination has won. A closer look at the awards list reveals the Discovery Centre's success in categories such as ecotourism, sustainability, and social responsibility. Mentioning the destination's success so clearly might be seen as a way for the Daintree Discovery Centre to distinguish themselves from other similar destinations and to convince the tourist that they know what they are doing, they are renowned for their actions and, therefore, worth a visit.

In order to distinguish themselves from similar destinations, the destinations sometimes seem to present themselves as wholesome experiences. Already on the home page of the Discovery Centre's website, the visitor is encouraged to *do the Daintree* (Daintree Discovery Centre). Even though the use of the phrase seems to be limited to one banner only, it has a significant role on the website, as

the banner continues to follow the reader throughout the website. *Do the Daintree* refers to the visit as an experience on its own, with its own phrase, emphasising the exclusiveness and uniqueness of the visit. The home page also includes images of the varied landscape, aerial walkways, and the Southern Cassowary, which is a large, endangered bird native to the Daintree rainforest, and also an important subject of the Daintree's protection programmes (Daintree Discovery Centre). Naturally, the destination's main attraction is the rainforest, and by using the pictured walkways the tourist will be able to explore the forest easily. These images begin to convey the idea of what the overall experience might consist of for the tourist, beginning the process of mental tourism, which refers to the idea of providing enough incentives for the reader to allow for an imaginative trip to the destination before making any travel decisions or leaving the house (Mahadi et al., 2011).

In comparison to the Daintree Discovery Centre, the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve in Costa Rica keeps their website simple. Most of the images found on the Monteverde reserve's website seem to be used simply for the benefit of grabbing the reader's attention, as the images appear on the background of the titles introducing different sections, where they might include a part of a landscape or a close-up of a bird or plant, regardless of the following topic. Contrarily, sometimes the images in the banners seem to have a purpose of emphasising the specific topic that will be introduced next on the website. An example of such may be the banner introducing the attractions of Monteverde divided into categories of *Sustainable Monteverde*, *Extreme Monteverde*, and *Rural Monteverde*, named as if to represent different choices of experience. These categories are presented on images of a bridge, a person ziplining, and a handful of berries, respectively, each picture correlating strongly with the particular title, providing visual stimulus in order to convey a more vivid idea of what each experience might consist of. An exception to this pattern may be the slide show presenting the history of the reserve: the pictures used on the slides are either from the different decades presented on the slides or they have been edited to look older. Either way, as the pictures become clearer parallel to the reserve's geographical expansion and the substantial increase in the number of visitors, the tourist is able to see how the destination respects its history and is aware of some of the milestones that have been achieved throughout the years, from the opening of the reserve to the expansion of its area.

While the effort put on the visuality of the websites seems to differ from simple to vibrant, the textual aspect and the language choices appear to have more similarities. The word *unique*, in particular, seems to be one of the most frequently used words on ecotourism destinations' websites for describing the rainforest environment, functioning as an attempt to distinguish the experience of the specific destination from others located in a rainforest setting. According to the Monteverde reserve's website,

for instance, the uniqueness in their case is partially the result of the clouds that continuously cover the forest and maintain similar climatic conditions year-round. These conditions combined with the cloud cover also explain the name Cloud Forest (Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve). Correspondingly, the destinations that are located in the Daintree region in Australia – the Wilderness Lodge and the Discovery Centre – also focus on the uniqueness of the rainforest by using the word unique to describe the accommodation itself as well as the local flora and fauna. Moreover, the emphasis of the uniqueness is not conveyed only through the direct use of the word unique, but it is also visible in the abundance of superlatives used on the websites. In the case of the Daintree Discovery Centre, the access to the different levels of the rainforest at the interpretive centre is *unprecedented*, the Freshwater Aquarium is *the only one in Australia* and the Ribbonwood, also known as the Idiot Fruit, which can be found in the Daintree rainforest is *one of the rarest and most primitive* plants, to name only a few examples.

The use of superlatives functions as an attempt to distinguish the destinations from others located in similar environments. They may be a way to assure the tourists that even though they might have been to a rainforest before, this particular destination has something interesting to offer. Moreover, beyond the frequent use of superlatives there is the conveying of a certain type of atmosphere, which in the case of ecotourism destinations often seems to include the idea of a calm, tranquil environment. The tranquillity is highlighted in a study by Qiu (2013), in which the serenity and peace of mind that the tourists achieve at the ecotourism destination might inspire in them a desire to live sustainably themselves, in the hopes of gaining a similar peace in their daily lives as well. In order to highlight the unhurriedness of the destination, the Daintree Discovery Centre emphasises the aspect of being able to provide something for everyone, regardless of whether the tourist has a few hours or a few days. In order to deliver their promise, they have divided the Centre into smaller sections so that the tourist can explore as little or as much as they want or have time for. Additionally, in order to allow even more flexibility, the admission fee includes a Return Pass which means that the tourist can come back as many times as they want in the following week, encouraging them to explore the Discovery Centre and the Daintree rainforest entirely at their own pace.

At the Centre, the visitors have the option to either walk around on their own, take a self-guided audio tour or take a pre-booked guided tour that has been personalised according to the group's interests. The freedom of choice regarding the time spent at the destination is subtly emphasised by the use of language, as, for instance, the Discovery Centre's website encourages the visitors to *meander* along the walkways (Daintree Discovery Centre); the very definition of *meander* is "to wander aimlessly

or casually without urgent destination” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b). In a similar way to the Discovery Centre, when introducing the nature walks around the property, the Daintree Wilderness Lodge, an accommodation located in the Daintree rainforest, emphasises *calmness* and taking the time to *absorb* the *large amount of life that calls the Daintree Rainforest home* (Daintree Wilderness Lodge), in order to appreciate the forest that has been growing for hundreds of years.

Due to the forest setting, the ecotourism destinations often advertise the experience by highlighting its authenticity. However, the concept of authenticity has some issues. While the fact that the Daintree rainforest is also UNESCO World Heritage listed implicates that the area has been left in its most natural state for the most part (Daintree Wilderness Lodge), the meaning of authenticity in itself is ambiguous, as what is authentic is arguably dependent on the viewer’s perspective and personal background, and studies rarely take into consideration both sides of the discussion (Condevaux, 2009). That is, Condevaux’ study (2009) on the Māori people in New Zealand showed that even the cultural performances for tourists that some may view as inauthentic, were not considered as such by the Māori themselves. They simply viewed the performances as ones that were modified to better suit the audience while also being a significant part of their culture. The discussion on the authenticity of cultural performances goes to show how Western tourists, especially, often seem to consider indigenous cultures to be stagnant instead of dynamic, even though these cultures are everchanging and their customs have to be modified to suit the growing number of tourists along with other developments in the industry and the world. Only considering the tourists’ perception of authenticity creates an unbalanced view of the reality where at least the Māori people feel that they are able to show their authentic selves in the performances that they create for the tourists (Condevaux, 2009). Although the ecotourism destinations often include information about the local indigenous people and their history (see e.g., Daintree Discovery Centre about the Kuku Yalanji people), it should be noted that the authenticity of the experience advertised by the destinations is arguably entirely different from that of the authenticity of the indigenous people’s cultural identities. Be that as it may, the experience that the ecotourism destinations seek to provide is also always dependent on the visitor’s perspective.

Another issue regarding the experience itself is the accessibility. Reaching the Daintree Discovery Centre requires a two-hour drive from Cairns, not to mention that long distance travel seems to be the reality with most ecotourism destinations, as they are often located in secluded, remote areas. This results in the tourists supposedly having to travel by plane first, and possibly use public transportation in the city before renting a car to get to the desired destination. In order to make the drive appear less

of an inconvenience and more so a part of the overall experience, the Discovery Centre is defining the route as *one of the most beautiful coastal roads in the world* (Daintree Discovery Centre). The tourist might need to rent a car to get to the destination, but the journey may be thought of as the beginning of the Daintree experience. The Discovery Centre emphasises the attractiveness of the route by describing it almost as if it were a painting: *The scenery is unparalleled – sparkling azure blue waters contrast dramatically with the lush green of the tropical rainforest. Fringing reefs hug the coast providing an introduction to the wonders of the world famous Great Barrier Reef* (Daintree Discovery Centre). The use of descriptive, story-like language may be the destinations' way to help the tourists create their own mental image of the picture-perfect Australian scenery that awaits them at the destination, helping in the process of mental tourism (Mahadi et al., 2011).

However, it should be noted that the destinations have approached the issue of accessibility by encouraging more environmentally friendly options, and in doing so attempting to avoid Hall's (2014) idea of anti-consumption consumption where ecotourism destinations fail to take into consideration the emissions of the travel to and from the destination. For instance, although the Canopy Treehouses and Wildlife Sanctuary, an accommodation in the Australian Atherton Tablelands, is also a remote destination that can only be reached by a car, they attempt to make the drive less of an issue from an environmental perspective by emphasising that even though a car is required, the distances between the activities and attractions at the destination itself are not long (The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary). Similarly, the Daintree Discovery Centre highlights the range of alternatives available regarding the hire car by emphasising on their website that a four-wheel drive vehicle is not necessary and the hire cars range *from large recreational campers to the most economical mini sedan* (Daintree Discovery Centre). The Daintree Discovery Centre's way of including the drive in their Daintree experience is also a way to make the distance seem like the beginning of the adventure, instead of seeing it as another part of the long travel.

According to their website, the journey to the Daintree Discovery Centre also includes the possibility of crossing the river via a ferry, which the Discovery Centre highlights as an essential part of the experience that should not be missed. Overall, the entire journey from Cairns to the Discovery Centre appears to play a significant part in the experience of *doing the Daintree*. The Daintree Wilderness Lodge, also located in the Daintree rainforest in Australia, seems to continue the Discovery Centre's concept of the Daintree area as an experience from the beginning until the end of the stay by introducing themselves as *not just a holiday, but your true rainforest experience*.

In a similar way as the Daintree Discovery Centre, the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve – a private conservation site located in Costa Rica – has also taken a predominantly informative approach through a story-like use of language on their website, which is visible already on the home page, as their mission is presented to the visitor through a promise:

- (1) We promise to transform your visit into a magical experience of the connection between nature and sustainable tourism in a unique forest that we have dedicated to conservation, investigation and environmental education.

Explicitly promising a *magical experience* already on top of the home page requires a high level of confidence in the destination's abilities to meet the visitors' expectations. However, it is worthwhile to note that while the Daintree region in Australia seems to focus on creating a comprehensive, active experience for the tourists, the Monteverde reserve's approach seems to differ slightly: As seen in example 1, instead of offering an active experience, their promise refers to the *connection between nature and sustainable tourism* (Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve). That is, their aim seems to be more inclined towards demonstrating the benefits of nature and spreading the information on how and why it should be reserved and protected, instead of offering a wide range of activities for the tourists. Therefore, the Monteverde reserve might be more attractive to the tourists who are especially intrigued by the scientific aspect, than to the tourists that might prefer more activity-based destinations, such as the Daintree Discovery Centre.

The Daintree Discovery Centre and the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Retreat both advertise their destinations as experiences, although their approaches to the concept of an experience differ. For the Discovery Centre, the experience is more of an adventure that begins even before the tourists have reached the destination. Travelling to the destination is perceived as part of the Daintree experience, the drive over to the destination being conceived as the perfect opportunity to enjoy the scenery that is described as some of *the most beautiful coastal roads in the world*. At the destination, the tourists are then welcome to personalise their visit to suit their needs, wants and schedules. The way that destinations such as the Daintree Discovery Centre are marketed seems to fit the assumed target group of the more active tourists; on the basis of the website the tourist might expect a holiday where they have the chance to take their time to educate themselves about the environment either on

a tour or by simply reading the information provided at the facilities, while also having the opportunity to partake in a wide range of exotic sports and activities in the vicinity.

The Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve's approach to the experience is different in a sense that, instead of promoting experiencing the destination, they are emphasising the experience of the connection that lies between sustainability and nature. That is, instead of offering an active experience, they are inviting the tourists to see for themselves how the two entities come together, while simultaneously educating them why it is essential that they do. The Monteverde reserve's experience is directed more towards the tourist's mind than their body. The promise *to transform your visit into a magical experience of the connection between nature and sustainable tourism* is an invitation for the tourists to learn more about the environment, see why it is important to protect it, and to experience first-hand how theory can be put into practice. These two approaches to the concept of an experience are only a couple examples of the ways that destinations can present themselves to the tourist through building the visit up to be a wholesome experience for body and mind. The websites create vibrant, visual mental images of the experiences to help the tourist to get a better idea of the destination and what it stands for, and, in some cases, to see whether they might prefer one or the other.

## **5.2 Prioritising environmentally friendly practices**

Despite the experience aspect, the ecotourism destinations are, by definition, devoted to sustainable operation and the protection of the environment. The Daintree Discovery Centre is an ecotourism facility that is widely considered a leader in sustainability. Being a part of the ecotourism industry, they have clearly stated their vision, mission and goal on their website: they aim to maintain their position as an exemplary ecotourism facility in Australia, and they want the Discovery Centre to be *a benchmark for ecotourism and ... nationally acknowledged and internationally recognised as the unparalleled leader in the provision of information about all aspects of the low-land tropical environment* (Daintree Discovery Centre). Their mission and vision seem to be largely focused on the success of the Centre as a business organisation and a tourism destination rather than emphasising the development of their sustainable operation, for instance; they emphasise the pursue of excellence in everything they do and, thus, their aim is to provide an *unforgettable experience* for all visitors.

The aspect of sustainability becomes particularly relevant in relation to the Discovery Centre's existence as part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage area which is also recognised as having the

highest number of rare or endangered flora and fauna in the world. Being a part of the Wet Tropics, the Discovery Centre is required to follow the environmental values set by the Wet Tropics Management Authority as well as those of the Department of the Environment in Australia, which contributes to the Discovery Centre's transparency in their operation, creating trust between the destination and its prospective visitors. The Centre's importance is further highlighted in educating the visitors about the rainforest's fragility and the ways to protect it (Daintree Discovery Centre). Even though the aspect of sustainability might not be stated distinctly in the section defining the Centre's mission and vision, they do highlight environmental sensitivity on the website in general, as can be seen in example 2 below. Building on the principles of ecotourism, the Daintree Discovery Centre attempts to justify their existence as an ecotourism facility by stating that

- (2) Everything we do at the Centre reinforces the need to preserve this very special ancient rainforest. A series of interconnected, elevated walkways protect the forest's fragile root systems. Interpretive displays foster environmental sustainability and the Centre models best practice in water conservation, waste management, recycling and eco-friendly design.

Furthermore, the visitors' responsibility to take care of the environment is also highlighted on the website, as they state that every visitor should ensure that the environment is left as it was before their visit (Daintree Discovery Centre). Fundamentally, the responsibility of keeping the surroundings as pristine as possible falls to the tourist, as the staff working at the destination can only do so much. Although the aerial walkways and elevated boardwalks allow the visitors to explore the rainforest from an unusual perspective, they do also protect the environment by keeping the forest's root systems safe, allowing the tourists to explore the environment without having to worry about their step. By using the walkways, the tourists also have a rare chance to see wild cassowaries in their natural habitat from a safe distance (Daintree Discovery Centre). *Aerial walkway* might be an odd term for the general public, which is why a picture of one helps the tourist to understand and visualise the concept, as well as to visualise themselves on the walkways, which is crucial considering Mahadi et al.'s (2011) findings on mental tourism being the first step towards real tourism. The walkways also enable accessibility for a wider range of mobilities. The Discovery Centre is very transparent about the problems that people with mobility devices may face at the destination, as the website includes an entire page dedicated to information and instructions on mobility and accessibility,



containing detailed information ranging from the locations of ramps to the width of the wheelchair tyres that are most suitable for the walkways.

The destinations do not exist solely for the tourists' enjoyment, though, as rainforests all around the world provide exceptional environments for research. The Daintree rainforest is no different, as the studies performed in the Daintree have found many plants, some with significant medicative characteristics, that are native to the Daintree and cannot be found anywhere else in Australia or in the world (Daintree Wilderness Lodge). The area around the Canopy Treehouses and Wildlife Sanctuary in the Atherton Tablelands, Australia, has been used for research purposes since the 1980s. The findings resulting from these research projects have provided the Canopy Treehouses area with a distinguishing feature, as the surrounding rainforest produces *4 to 7 times the amount of fruit than other study sites in nearby rainforests*. Furthermore, the wildlife in the Canopy is remarkably dense due to all the clearings performed in its surroundings, as the animals have had to narrow down their habitat significantly (The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary), which not only enhances the importance of protecting the environment but also provides rare conditions for a wide range of scientific research.

In addition to the research being conducted on the premises, the destinations also seem to be a part of a wide range of programmes designed to protect the environment, educate locals and visitors, as well as to develop the local community. Especially the protection of the diverse species of rainforests seems to be a natural addition to ecotourism destinations' operation. Moreover, the rainforests often have certain species that require more attention, which is why the destinations have developed programmes to help these species. For instance, the Monteverde Reserve has a programme to help the Resplendent Quetzal, especially. The Resplendent Quetzal is a fairly large, threatened bird that is best known for its ability of changing colour (Ray, n.d.). Even though the quetzal's habitat reaches the surrounding countries as well, the Resplendent Quetzal is often reported seen in Costa Rica, specifically, as a result of the intense conservation of their habitats in the area (Ray, n.d.). Thus, the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve provides a newsletter to help spread information on the conservation programme that aims to protect the habitat and the conditions for the quetzal's reproduction in Monteverde. The reserve also has similar newsletters for environmental education, as well as for promoting community initiatives for sustainable development and offering information on the strategies developed to combat climate change (Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve). Similarly, the Daintree Discovery Centre has contributed to their local community by supporting a programme that embeds the language of the indigenous Kuku Yalanji into a state school community

(Ralph, 2019b). According to the website, the Daintree Discovery Centre was sold to the Aboriginal Development Benefits Trust (ADBT) in 2018. The ADBT is a foundation that, among other things, operates to help indigenous people and their communities economically. The Discovery Centre itself may also be seen as a contribution to the local community, as the founders were inspired after their first visit to the Daintree rainforest to develop the Discovery Centre in order to provide more comprehensive information about the rainforest and a more enjoyable visit to the guests, while also taking care of the environment and protecting the forest (Daintree Discovery Centre).

Because the destinations are also organisations, one of their aims, by definition, is to attract increasingly more visitors through their marketing in order to gain more profit and maintain their operation. For instance, as the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve has developed over the years, they report that their visitor numbers have risen from a reported 471 to some 90 000 annually (Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve), even though they limit the number of tourists by allowing 160 visitors in the area at any given time (Monahan, 2004) without the possibility of booking in advance (Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve). The reserve also has different prices depending on whether the visitor is a student, child or adult, and whether they are local or foreign. The admission fee for locals in 2020 is \$5-8 and for foreigners \$12-25. Additionally, parking in the area is \$5. By looking at the prices only, it can be deduced that the Monteverde reserve seems to encourage local/national visitation more than international. Conversely, the Daintree Discovery Centre seems to aim their marketing to both domestic and international tourists equally, and reports receiving 400 000 visitors annually from all around the world (Daintree Discovery Centre). The approaches to the management of visitor numbers differ between destinations as well as researchers: Some suggest that it would be beneficial for the destinations if the visits were longer, resulting in more money spent in the area (Sandbrook, 2010), which the Daintree Discovery Centre seems to agree with as they provide a seven-day Return Pass with the admission fee. Some, however, do not see the visitor numbers as an issue per se, but rather the issue lies in how the increasing numbers are managed in terms of the facilities, including waste management (Wood & Glasson, 2005). As definite solutions have not been discovered to this conundrum in the tourism industry, it is up to the destinations to decide on the most suitable approach for their needs.

The preservation of the environment and the sustainable operation seem to be foundational elements of ecotourism destinations, by definition. However, sometimes these principles seem to clash with the organisation being a privately owned and privately funded business that ought to make profit in order to maintain its operation. Some examples can be found on the Daintree Discovery Centre's

website as well. For instance, their website contains a page titled *Help Save Daintree Cassowaries*. The suggestions first include practical guidelines, such as slowing down when driving through areas that are occupied by cassowaries, and donating to Rainforest Rescue, an organisation that helps with re-vegetation of the rainforest and thus enlarges the cassowaries' habitat. However, one of the options is to *Visit the Daintree Discovery Centre*, where the Centre promises to match the donations made in cash on the premises. While they are making a contribution to help the endangered species, they are also taking advantage of the opportunity to promote the Discovery Centre in the hopes of attracting more visitors.

Located in the same area as the Discovery Centre, the Daintree Wilderness Lodge has been built prioritising environmentally friendly practices. All buildings are elevated in order to protect the forest floor, the buildings have been built around the trees in order to avoid cutting them and the waste, noise, and pollution at the destination have been minimised, according to the Wilderness Lodge's website. Being a remote destination, the area uses generated power and the Wilderness Lodge reports using both generated and low-voltage battery power in order to reduce noise pollution and minimise their carbon footprint. In addition, a water waste system that *break[s] down disposal from the showers, toilets and sinks* is in use, which is why the Wilderness Lodge asks their guests to favour more eco-friendly products while staying at the lodge (Daintree Wilderness Lodge). While the eco-friendly waste system allows for the destination to better manage the increasing visitor numbers (see e.g., Wood & Glasson, 2005), most of the aforementioned steps that the lodge has taken towards eco-friendly operation would be relatively easy for the tourists to implement in their own lives as well. This is how the accommodation can help influence change in the world little by little – by leading with example, inspiring small changes towards more sustainable living. These small, environmentally friendly changes are in accordance with Hall's (2014) idea of social marketing, where essentially any change towards sustainability is enough to potentially influence similar changes in others.

As an eco-friendly destination, the Daintree Wilderness Lodge's main focus too lies on protecting the rainforests and their diversity. Ecotourism organisations often cooperate with foundations and organisations, and the Wilderness Lodge report making their biggest contributions to the Rescue Rainforest Foundation. This seems to be in accordance with the lodge's principle of leaving the nature and its animals as they were, each of them being seen as an indispensable part of maintaining the forest's wellbeing. As the founders were already aware of the tourism industry's impact on the environment at the time of planning the destination, they were able to focus on minimising the negative impacts from the beginning and following the criteria required for eco accreditation

(Daintree Wilderness Lodge). Overall, it appears that the Wilderness Lodge emphasises the importance of ecological interdependence (Hall, 2014) with their operation which is supported by their principle of not getting rid of any living creatures, regardless of their size or interference with the visitors' space (Daintree Wilderness Lodge). Moreover, ecological interdependence is highlighted on multiple occasions on their website, as they subtly keep reminding the visitor that every part of the rainforest is connected to and works with the others in one way or another. In the section on flora and fauna, for instance, the Wilderness Lodge uses animals from musky rat-kangaroos to beetles and mushrooms as examples to explain how the animals contribute to the forest's wellbeing, and how building the cabins away from the ground enables the security of not only the guests staying in the cabin but also the security of the animals living underneath (Daintree Wilderness Lodge). The ecological interdependence also benefits humans, as the Daintree rainforest's history exposes the rare opportunity of using the rainforest's plants for life-saving drugs, as many of the plants that are native to the Daintree cannot be found anywhere else in Australia or in the world. Naturally, the Daintree Wilderness Lodge also highlights the amount and quality of oxygen produced as the Daintree rainforest's *largest contribution in the current environmental climate* (Daintree Wilderness Lodge).

Ecotourism destinations also promote other organisations, sometimes through cooperation. Out of the destinations examined in this thesis, the cooperation between the Daintree Discovery Centre and Cairns Airport, especially, seems somewhat questionable. With an environmental organisation called Rainforest Rescue, the Discovery Centre and Cairns Airport have produced a page on the Discovery Centre's website titled *Help Save Daintree Cassowaries*. The page includes a picture resembling a pile of social media posts of families standing next to cassowaries, and below the main picture are tags such as *#weneedrainforest*, *#cairnsairport*, *#goingtoseeacassowary*, *#daytrip*. The tags used in the picture seem peculiar: While a *#daytrip* is not generally ecotourism destinations' or green tourism's preferred aim in general, adding *#cairnsairport* encourages not only flying, which is understandable considering the page has been produced in cooperation with Cairns airport, but also long distance travel, by association. These tags raise questions, as studies have shown that in order to reduce emissions caused by the tourism industry, the number of long-distance trips should be lowered, air travel should be reduced on short-distance trips and the trips should last longer whenever possible (UNEP & UNWTO, 2012).

### 5.3 Sustainable luxury and serenity in eco-friendly accommodations

Accommodation is an integral aspect of every holiday. In this section, three accommodation providers are introduced and discussed, focusing mostly on the private, independent organisations in Australia, namely the Daintree Wilderness Lodge and the Canopy Treehouses and Wildlife Sanctuary. The Costa Rican La Casona Lodge operates as a part of the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve and is included here mainly as a point of comparison for the analysis. While the eco-friendly accommodations may also appear to construct themselves as experiences, in a similar way as the tourist destinations discussed in section 5.1 do, it appears that instead of offering active experience the accommodations tend to focus on conveying a certain type of atmosphere to the reader. More specifically, the atmosphere conveyed through the websites is often one of relaxation and serenity, the surrounding environment being seen as a place of contentment.

In a similar way to the destinations discussed in section 5.2, descriptions of eco-friendly accommodations often include words such as sustainability and authenticity. These words may generally inspire mental visualisations of a rustic cottage with a simple, ascetic décor. Interestingly, the examination of the eco-accommodations chosen for this thesis shows that, more often than not, the words seem to represent the opposite: eco-friendly, sustainable accommodation often refers to an exclusive form of high-quality, boutique cabins. Out of the three accommodations, the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve's private La Casona Lodge is the humblest alternative, its main advantage and attraction being its location at the heart of the reserve, which is surrounded by a variety of different tourist attractions, such as a treetop restaurant, a butterfly garden, and a tour of sugar, coffee, and cocoa plantations. The title banner preceding the section about the lodge on the reserve's website includes pictures of simplistic, wooden rooms with bunkbeds on both sides, meeting the initial expectations of a sustainable accommodation alternative, as discussed above. The lodge's page on TripAdvisor provides a more comprehensive overview of the lodge, explaining that there are seven rooms available in total with either bunkbeds, twin beds or single beds, which is also in line with the initial expectations (La Casona Lodge, n.d.).

According to the Monteverde reserve's website, La Casona Lodge has *a rustic personality* and is *in harmony with the nature* of Monteverde, further emphasising the mission of maintaining sustainable operation at the destination. Additionally, according to the website, the individual rooms at the lodge have their own bathrooms and showers with hot water, and wireless internet is provided. A stay also includes three meals a day at the restaurant that is also located at the reserve (Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve). An advantage of staying within the reserve is that the price for the

accommodation also includes the admission fee, so the guests enjoy the benefit of exploring the forest as much as they like without having to worry about the visitation capacity limiting their access (La Casona Lodge, n.d.). Even though the reality of the lodge is mostly in line with the typical expectations of a sustainable accommodation, the advantage of its location and the perks of having a bathroom, access to wireless internet and getting three meals a day certainly provide more luxury than one might expect of a stay in a rainforest, taking away the mundane task of having to worry about food on the daily and allowing more time for other activities.

Despite the benefits of having internet and several meals a day, La Casona Lodge seems like the plainest alternative out of the accommodations examined in this thesis. The rest of the accommodations seem more exclusive and personalised. The Daintree Wilderness Lodge, an independent accommodation provider located in the Daintree rainforest, in Australia, has a website that is simple in terms of the range of media applied. That is, the majority of the content is textual, relying strongly on the reader's ability to visualise the destination, with a few complementary photo collections including photos of the flora and fauna, the forest, the cabins, and the outdoor spa. That said, the pictures are often used merely for decorative purposes instead of supporting the content of the text. A banner preceding the introduction of the rooms, for instance, contains a blurry picture of the forest and does not hint at the following topic, presenting an example of such decorative use. Sometimes the images are related to the subject: for example, the background of the title banner for flora and fauna is a close-up picture of a cassowary, picturing one of the rarest species at the destination. On the pages where the banner is less self-explanatory, the page often includes more pictures along with the text. That is, even the page where the rooms are introduced with a blurry picture of a forest contains more visual stimulation as the reader can see that the cabins have wooden floors, air conditioning, as well as carefully folded towels conveying a sense of a quality hotel accommodation. Considering the typical connotations of sustainable living, the idea of a luxury hotel in the middle of the rainforest is different, not to mention a more easily approachable alternative for the majority of the tourists that have gotten used to urban living.

The Canopy Treehouses and Wildlife Sanctuary are briefly described on their website as a *boutique treehouse accommodation set in 100 acres of pristine ancient rainforest*. The destination is located in Atherton Tablelands, Australia, an area known for its waterfalls and weekend markets. Thus, as may be expected, nature plays a significant role on the Canopy Treehouses and Wildlife Sanctuary's gallery page, as they include pictures of the environment along with the treehouses. However, the distinctive feature in comparison to some of the other destinations is that the majority of the Canopy

Treehouses pictures are of simple moments, such as spending time with family and friends on the treehouse balcony, enjoying the nature through the window while taking a bath in candlelight, and taking a walk in the forest (The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary). By including such relatable pictures, the Canopy Treehouses is helping the tourists to see themselves in the destination, imagining their own family in the same place as the one in the picture.

The relatable pictures combined with the audio file on the home page helps the reader to create mental images, which in turn enable them to get a more comprehensive idea of what a holiday in the rainforest – and specifically at the Canopy Treehouses and Wildlife Sanctuary – might look and sound like. Adding one more physical sense into the mental image of the holiday, the Canopy Treehouses advertises some of the local food markets and suppliers at the Atherton Tablelands which is an area known for its farming lands (The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary). As a self-proclaimed *foodie's paradise*, several local farms and organisations are supported on the Canopy Treehouses' website, including a biodynamic farm, a distillery, and a couple of wildlife tour organisers. Overall, The Canopy Treehouses and Wildlife Sanctuary seems to dedicate a significant part of their website to other local organisations, and the focus is largely on the Tablelands area as a community instead of merely on the promotion of the treehouses. The community approach might prove to be highly beneficial for an accommodation provider, since a growing interest in an area naturally increases the desire to visit, and in that case the tourist is, conveniently, already on the website of an accommodation located at the desired destination.

The way that language is used on the website has a remarkable effect on the website's overall atmosphere, which is why the linguistic choices often seem to be carefully thought out. The Canopy Treehouses has adopted a fairy-tale-like narrative to construct expectations of a magical environment: for instance, when discussing the wildlife in the area, the Canopy Treehouses creates a mental image where the guests *wake to a serenade of birdsong every morning* as the tropical birds and parrots *greet them on the Treehouse balcony* (The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary). The experience of a rainforest fairy-tale surrounded by animals is certainly in line with Sowards' (2012) idea of an exotic counterexperience which refers to the tourists' tendency of looking for a complete opposite of their mundane daily lives. Maintaining the idea of a counterexperience, the Canopy Treehouses' website introduces the seasonal calendar in the form of the one by the indigenous *Yirrganydji*. For them, *Kurrabana* refers to the wet season and *Kurraminya* to the dry season. These seasons are then divided into shorter seasons, and although the Canopy Treehouses is open year-round, they encourage everyone to experience *Kurrabana*, the wet season, especially (The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife

Sanctuary), which is arguably the most characteristic feature of a rainforest, further emphasising the uniqueness of the experience. The Canopy Treehouses only break the fairy-tale narrative when it comes to giving necessary instructions and safety measures to the prospective visitors. According to their website, the Atherton Tablelands area is free from most dangerous animals, but they do underline the necessity to always keep a safe distance from any animals met in the wilderness. Continuing with the fairy-tale image, the Canopy Treehouses also refers to themselves as *the privileged custodians* of the area and its inhabitants (The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary).

In addition to the fairy-tale, the Canopy Treehouses seems to emphasise the idea of being a home away from home. This is accomplished especially through the continuous focus on family in the texts and in the pictures that seem to be centred around families as much as they are about the beauty of the environment. As mentioned earlier, the pictures of simple moments that are easy to relate to help the tourists to see themselves and their families at the destination. Adding the audio from the rainforest functions as a way to begin familiarising the prospective guests to the sounds of the environment. When they reach the destination, they will have heard some of the sounds of the rainforest before and the environment might not feel intimidatingly foreign. Additionally, the Canopy Treehouses are built to resemble a home through fully equipped kitchens to enable home-cooked meals and also through the addition of a fireplace to maintain the warmth and comfort even through the colder seasons. The fact that the treehouses are located away from one another means that the family will have complete privacy to enjoy each other's company without the need to worry about disturbing the neighbours next door. Particularly the privacy and not having to deviate from the family's daily routine, unless desired, seem likely to be highly alluring factors for the tourists travelling with children, for instance.

It seems that many ecotourism destinations tend to prefer secluded accommodation organisations over the ones that operate as a part of the main attraction in the area. This allows for the accommodation providers to have the possibility to use their creativity to their advantage in their operation and marketing. For instance, described as *not just a holiday, but your true rainforest experience*, the Daintree Wilderness Lodge emphasises the uniqueness of the accommodation and the environment surrounding it. Being in the heart of the Australian rainforest the Wilderness Lodge certainly qualifies as a remote destination, but in spite of that they say they have succeeded in maintaining *the smallest ecological footprint without sacrificing on the facilities you would expect of accommodation closer to 'civilisation'* (Daintree Wilderness Lodge), which may be seen as another way to influence change in the traditional expectations surrounding the idea of sustainable living.



There is a wide range of accommodation alternatives available in the Daintree area, which is why the Wilderness Lodge has been able to include a page to help the visitor choose the right accommodation for them. Naturally, while explaining what the visitor should take into consideration in choosing the best accommodation to suit their needs, they also mention that as an eco-accredited accommodation with individual, private cabins where *guests feel like they are staying deep in the tropical jungle surrounded by its wildlife yet have all the comforts of home*, staying at the Wilderness Lodge is worth considering (Daintree Wilderness Lodge, 2019).

The Canopy Treehouses have a similar approach, as already on the home page the treehouses are said to *give you a true sense of home and comfort in the wilderness*. However, the creative freedom in the accommodations' marketing seems to result in slight differences between the organisations' target groups. For instance, on the basis of their website, it seems that the Canopy Treehouses and Wildlife Sanctuary is mostly targeting both the environmentally sensitive and adventurous tourists, as they explain the history and development of the area in detail and advertise the varied activities offered in the vicinity. There is also a minute-long video on the home page, titled *Explore Tropical North Queensland, one moment at a time*, showing details of the landscape and the different activities available in the area (Tropical North Queensland, 2019). More videos can be found on the Canopy Treehouses website's image gallery, where they range from a forest cycling video to views of white beaches and waterfalls in the middle of the rainforest. The videos are often focused on extreme sports and the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, in which the treehouses are located, is also called *an outdoor lovers' playground, with white water rafting, drift snorkelling and hiking all in a day's fun* (The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary). The use of adventurous visual images seems to be rather common in tourism promotional materials, as Sowards (2012) explains that including these vivid images or descriptions of activities lets the tourist know that they can expect sublime experiences at the destination, which is a powerful means to increase mental visualisation and, hence, increase the tourist's will to travel.

The destinations also often promote the many activities available, ranging from guided tours to secret swimming holes and jungle surfing (Daintree Wilderness Lodge). The extreme activities attract the more adventurous tourists, while the more easily approachable activities attract the tourists that mostly enjoy taking in the scenery and trying out more exotic local dishes, for example. Local dishes are also offered at the Wilderness Lodge, for instance, as their private restaurant caters only the guests that are staying at the lodge, while guaranteeing that the produce served is as local and as organic as possible. Having a private restaurant in addition to a secluded cabin amplifies the sense of exclusivity

at the destination: the text introducing the restaurant is also accompanied by a picture of the restaurant and its terrace which the text defines as *the unique open air venue* (Daintree Wilderness Lodge). The difference between a terrace and an open air venue presents a prime example of how language can be used to stimulate more attractive mental images.

For some tourists, the idea of a home away from home might be more attractive than a complete escape from it. The Canopy Treehouses' concept of a holiday home is subtly highlighted by their mention of the treehouses being safe for children and by the promotion of the possibility of booking multiple treehouses at once in order to bring the entire family along. However, in contrast to the daily life at home, being located in the middle of the Australian rainforest also means that mobile phone signal is reported weak at best and wireless internet is only available at the reception building. Even though the lack of internet might generally be considered a deficiency in today's world, the Canopy Treehouses is turning it into a positive by pointing out the opportunity to *disconnect from the electronics and create wonderful memories* (The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary). With the world expecting everyone to be available at all times, it can be a refreshing alternative to not have electronics to rely on for entertainment, a welcome return to a more primitive lifestyle to enhance one's search for the connection to the nature. While a study examining the authenticity of the Māori people's performances suggests that giving the audience a chance to participate in a cultural performance may be too short a time to satisfy the tourist's need to let go of their day-to-day life (Condevaux, 2009), a few night's stay at a place without mobile phone reception might provide a longer, more comprehensive opportunity to detach from one's modern, daily routine.

The strikingly different scenery may also help with the process of detaching oneself from the daily life at home, which is why the beauty of the contrasts of the landscape's *white sand, clear blue water and lush rainforest* are highlighted on the Daintree Wilderness Lodge's website to inspire the potential future visitor to use their imagination to create their own expectations of the ideal scenery. The Wilderness Lodge also describes the nearby beach as *the least touristy beach in the area*, which functions both as a way to differentiate the Wilderness Lodge from the majority of the accommodation alternatives in the Daintree, and as a means to emphasise authenticity: there will not be too many tourists around, so the guests that choose to stay at the Wilderness Lodge get to enjoy the environment in its most pristine state. The cabins are described as relaxing, *private hideaways* that are *tucked away beneath the canopy and under the beautiful fan palms* and are filled with sunlight all day long (Daintree Wilderness Lodge). The language used is quite descriptive, but also vague enough for the tourist to imagine and create their own ideal of a private hideaway. Again, this is an

example of how the destination uses language as a tool to help mental tourism. By providing some information and details about the accommodation, they are helping the reader create a fairly accurate visualisation of what they can expect of the holiday. That said, they also use more vague expressions, such as calling the cabins private hideaways, leaving room for the reader to visualise their own ideal hideaway, making the destination even more desirable by including personal preferences.

According to the Canopy Treehouses and Wildlife Sanctuary's website, the surrounding land was saved from clearing in the 1900s, and the area was able to survive another clearing in the mid-twentieth century. The last treehouse was finished in 2002, and the land around the biggest treehouse is being reforested in order to increase habitat area. The clearings narrowed down the habitat for many species in the area, which is why the wildlife is remarkably dense and in need of active protection (The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary). Whereas the Daintree Wilderness Lodge describes their accommodation as a hideaway, the name of the Canopy Treehouses and Wildlife Sanctuary is rather self-explanatory as such. The history section on their website shows that they used to be called the Canopy Treehouses and Wildlife Retreat. A retreat is generally used to refer to places of safety (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-c). Nowadays, as a Wildlife Sanctuary, the function stands but the emphasis might be slightly more specific, as sanctuary is generally used to refer to areas that provide "refuge for wildlife" as "predators are controlled and hunting is illegal" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-d).

The eco-friendly accommodations at rainforest destinations present themselves as exclusive, high-quality destinations. While the approaches differ between the providers, the main idea seems to be to offer a getaway from the hectic everyday life for all guests. That is, a secluded cabin surrounded by nature, without too many incentives to allow for time dedicated to oneself and their family, which is increasingly rare in a world where it seems like everyone is expected to be available at all times. Qiu (2013) supports the idea that eco-friendly accommodation providers often promote a simple life on the outside while emphasising vividness of the spiritual experience: in addition to the new surroundings, it is the harmony and balance within oneself that is supposed to lead to the letting go of the stress of the everyday at home. Even though the environment is exotic, the cabin resembles a home to bring peace and serenity. Eco-friendly accommodation can be seen as a place for de-stressing or simply a new, exotic travel experience. Whatever it is for each individual tourist, the nature plays the most significant part in the experience. The environmental sustainability practiced by the accommodation providers is not necessarily visibly highlighted at all times but practicing sustainability in and of itself might make an impression on the tourists and influence them to

implement some of the practices in their own lives. Following the principles of social marketing, it is important to make the changes attractive and easily approachable. For instance, by asking the visitors to favour eco-friendly hygiene products when staying at the lodge, the Daintree Wilderness Lodge might be introducing the tourists to products they have never tried before but that they may enjoy enough to keep using similar products at home. Such relatively small changes make it easier to move on to more advanced alternatives in time.

#### **5.4 Nature as a magical place of wellbeing and communal value**

Nature is an essential part of the entire ecotourism industry. Previous research on nature discourse has established that the way that nature is described and discussed affects the way that people perceive the environment and the world as a whole (see e.g., Kvidal-Røvik, 2018; Qiu, 2013). Furthermore, it has been suggested that not only does nature discourse affect our perception but rather our perceptions are “structured *through* discourse” (Kvidal-Røvik, 2018, p. 796, emphasis in original). Language plays an essential part in constructing the relationship between humans and nature (Qiu, 2013). Moreover, language has a remarkable influence on what tourists expect from the destination they are travelling to (Mahadi et al., 2011). While the focus of ecotourism destinations is, by definition, often inclined towards conserving the environment, many of the destinations also seem to share the almost spiritual perspective of attempting to enhance and rekindle the mutual relationship between humans and nature. This includes the understanding and practicing of the concept that has previously been referred to as ecological interdependence (Hall, 2014), which highlights the fundamental idea that every animal and plant has a vital role to play in the ecosystem of – in this case – a rainforest. Ecological independence is essentially based on the idea of mutual respect, which is why even the language used to describe the rainforests on all of the destinations’ websites conveys a strong sense of respect. The respect is visible in text as well as in pictures, as the protection of the forest floors is highlighted through the use of walkways, the trees are pictured from the ground up, emphasising their age and size, to name a couple of examples (see e.g., Daintree Discovery Centre, The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary).

In the ecotourism destinations examined in this thesis, nature is often depicted as the perfect setting for a fairy-tale-like stay at the destination. For instance, the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve promotes *a magical experience* and the treehouses at the Canopy Treehouses and Wildlife Sanctuary are pictured peeking through a dense forest, seemingly radiating a sense of warmth and

comfort in the middle of the wilderness. Taking the concept of a fairy-tale further, a stay at a treehouse is explained to include waking up *to a serenade of birdsong* while animals *greet you on the treehouse balcony* (The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary). The surrounding nature is also occasionally personified, as the Daintree Discovery Centre explains how the *fringing reefs hug the coast*, and the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve sees the rainforest as a *living laboratory* due to its use as a place for research. The fairy-tale does not end with animals visiting the accommodation, as the cabins are said to be *tucked away beneath the canopy* and the people at the destination are included in the fairy-tale by being the designated *custodians* of the surrounding forest (The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary). Similarly, the Daintree Wilderness Lodge introduces the endangered Southern Cassowary as *the protector* of the rainforest. Whoever the designated protector is in a particular area, clearly the common theme between the destinations is that the rainforests need to be protected. In the case of the Daintree Wilderness Lodge, the guardian is the cassowary that maintains the forest's diversity by roaming around the forest and spreading plant seeds to new areas (Daintree Wilderness Lodge), while the area surrounding the Canopy Treehouses is protected by humans. The latter may be partly due to the fact that humans are also the main threat to the area: for instance, the Canopy Treehouses has survived multiple clearings that have been performed in its surroundings in the past (The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary).

The destinations often describe the nature and the landscape in a way that might be more generally associated with paintings, especially when the focus is set on the contrasts between the different elements. For instance, the Daintree Discovery Centre uses descriptive adjectives to emphasise the diversity in having *mountain ranges, fast flowing streams and waterfalls, deep gorges and dense rainforest*, which is in accordance with the layout of the website, as the website seems to burst with greenery and forest throughout. Similarly, the Daintree Wilderness Lodge also highlights the contrasts in the landscape. In addition to descriptive adjectives, such as *fresh breezes, beautiful warm sunny days or very balmy and warm weather with high humidity*, they also help the prospective visitor to paint a mental image through colours by describing the combination of *white sand, clear blue water and lush rainforest*, as well as sceneries where *jungle-clad mountains sweep down towards the blue of the Coral Sea with only long white deserted beaches to separate them* (Daintree Wilderness Lodge).

The adjectives provide an opportunity to create a coherent atmosphere throughout the website, which is precisely what the Canopy Treehouses seems to have achieved. The language choices are used to underline the refreshing atmosphere of the destination: according to the Canopy Treehouses, the area

is known for *its lush tropical waterfalls, fresh fruits and local produce*, while also being a place to *fill your lungs and heart with clear fresh air* (The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary). *Heart* here can be thought of as a symbol of the mind and the spirit. In other words, instead of simply refreshing the body, the destination emphasises fresh air's significance to the wellbeing of the mind as well. Nature is seen as a place to clear one's head from the stress and busyness of the everyday life, which is completely in line with Qiu's (2013) similar findings on eco-hotel profiles. In a sense, it almost seems as if the destinations see themselves as one with the surrounding nature. That is, while the nature is considered a place to clear one's head and find serenity, so is the destination as a result of its location. Moreover, the ecotourism destinations examined in this thesis often seem to juxtapose the contrast between city and nature with the contrast between stress and relaxation and, ultimately, with the contrast between nature and civilisation. That is, the rainforest is depicted almost as an antonym to civilisation, a sanctuary from the hectic everyday life. In contrast, some destinations refrain from making the differentiation between rainforest and civilisation. On the contrary, some of the destinations specifically market themselves as a home away from home.

The destinations examined in the analysis represent three different types of destinations, namely, one is an interpretive centre, one is a biological reserve, and the rest are accommodation providers. Not only does the destination type determine the activities and services that the destination should be able to provide, but it also sets the tone for the website and may function as the initiating factor for building the tourists' expectations. Hence, the destinations seem to have chosen specific characteristics that they highlight throughout their website. These characteristics may be seen as a way to distinguish oneself from the rest of the destinations, especially from the ones representing the same destination type. On one hand there is the Daintree Discovery Centre, an interpretive centre that seems to market the destination as an experience from start to finish. That is, the drive to the Centre is seen as the beginning of *doing the Daintree*, and the activities at the destination are plentiful. The remoteness of the Daintree rainforest combined with the available activities make the destination the perfect place for an exclusive holiday. On the other hand, the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve's approach is noticeably different, as their website relies on factual information about the surrounding environment, combined with exact statistics regarding the diversity of the fauna and flora at the destination and in Costa Rica. In addition, the retreat calls the rainforest *a living laboratory* due to all the research and investigations conducted regularly at the reserve. Even the advertising video of the reserve shows cameras and other research devices planted in the rainforest, emphasising their significance to the reserve's operation. It is worth noting, however, that despite taking different approaches, nature plays a key role in each destination's operation.

Whereas most of the differences between the emphases of the interpretive centre and the biological reserve stem from the characteristics of each destination type, the accommodation providers' marketing approaches are not as bound by their destination type, which allows more freedom in choosing the most attractive characteristics of the location and facilities to lead with. That is, an interpretive centre is, by definition, centred around offering information on all kinds of phenomena through varying types of media. Similarly, when going to a reserve, people know to expect a fairly untouched setting that they are welcome to observe. When it comes to an accommodation, a place to stay in is essentially all that is guaranteed by definition, giving the accommodation providers space to personalise their facilities and marketing approaches. For instance, the Canopy Treehouses and Wildlife Sanctuary clearly highlights the refreshing atmosphere at the destination and its surroundings, emphasising the opportunity to *reconnect with nature and wildlife* in a safe environment that *will give you a true sense of home and comfort in the wilderness* (The Canopy Treehouses & Wildlife Sanctuary).

Rainforests are often seen as forests with a purpose: for the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve, it is *a living laboratory*, an exclusive place to carry out research for many scientific fields. While research is also being conducted at the Daintree Discovery Centre, as an interpretive centre they also provide information on the ways that the forest is used and has been used in the past. For instance, they explain how the indigenous people used the plants in the rainforest for medicinal purposes. Similarly, the Daintree Wilderness Lodge promote the need to save the rainforests for their medicinal purposes, saying that *there is an untapped potential to find life-saving drugs* as a result of the diversity of the rainforest which cannot be found elsewhere. They also emphasise the arguably most well-known factor of rainforests, which is their ability to produce unmatched amounts of oxygen. Thus, even though the rainforests are often seen as something to admire visually, they are also clearly described as places that need to be protected for their vital contribution to the world.

The pictures used on the Canopy Treehouses website add to the promise of a comfortable home-like environment by including families performing mundane tasks such as having dinner on the balcony, sitting in front of a fireplace and having a leisurely walk with the family in the forest. The Daintree Wilderness Lodge presents a different approach, as they emphasise the stay at the lodge as a *true rainforest experience*. While they also highlight the safe and relaxing atmosphere at the destination, the focus is set on the fact that the surrounding rainforest provides a completely distinct setting for a holiday than most accommodations. These differences are possible between accommodation destinations precisely because the characteristics of an accommodation are not as strict as they are

for other types. However, it is worth noting that in spite of having the freedom to essentially create any atmosphere they prefer, the reoccurring words on all of the accommodations' websites seem to refer to the calm and relaxing setting provided by nature, whether it be by directly mentioning the forest's healing properties or simply asking the visitors to take all the time they want and need to enjoy the beauty of their surroundings. "Only when we [as] human beings interact and identify with nature ... can we realize the true meanings of life and gain the simplistic happiness of life" (Qiu, 2013, p. 1883). Despite their differences, the foundational goal for all ecotourism accommodations examined here seems to support the findings of Qiu (2013): to rekindle the relationship between humans and nature, to relax and find harmony within in order to fully escape the busy modern world.



## 6 Discussion and conclusion

The thesis initially set out to examine ecotourism websites in an attempt to find out what kind of tourists the destinations are targeting and what aspects of their own operation the destinations emphasise on their promotional material. However, nature's significant role on all of the destinations' websites became clear quite early on in the research process, which is why a shift in focus was in order and a more careful examination of the nature discourse, in particular, was added into the analysis. In addition, the mental representations conveyed by the linguistic features, visual elements and audio on the websites are also a noticeable part of ecotourism, which is why ecolinguistics and multimodal discourse analysis naturally functioned as a background for the analysis.

Regardless of the differences between the rainforest experiences, nature plays the main role in both of them. The experience aspect reaches the accommodation organisations as well, as they promote authentic living in the middle of the rainforest. The accommodation is also often built up as an exotic rainforest experience, but it appears that the atmosphere of tranquillity and wellbeing seems to take priority over the active experience of the destination per se.

The research questions that were posed on the introduction were (1) how is environmental sustainability represented and (2) how is nature depicted on ecotourism destinations' websites? Beginning with the second question, a close inspection of the ecotourism destinations' websites shows that the destinations often seem to present nature as a place for the tourists to explore the harmony of the environment in order to find stillness and balance within, eventually leading to the letting go of any stress that they may have been holding to at home. While some destinations approach nature as the opposite of home, some destinations focus on the opposite approach and promote themselves as a home away from home. Interestingly, both approaches appear to have some characteristics in common, the most relevant one being the lack of the busyness and stress of the everyday. The mind will be at ease regardless of whether the destination is considered a home or not. In this sense, the presentation of nature in general seems to overlap with the presentation of the destination itself, as both are depicted as magical places for relaxation and wellbeing: places where the tourists can enjoy their surroundings and the simple things in life, such as fresh air, and where they get to focus on themselves. Some destinations also target the more adventurous tourists that enjoy extreme nature activities and sports, including the more exotic options, such as jungle surfing, sea-kayaking or taking a crocodile cruise (Daintree Wilderness Lodge). Nevertheless, nature is also seen as a place that needs protection because of its high value in research projects and for its medicinal properties. Overall, the ecotourism destinations are important not only in terms of providing comfort

and adventure to the tourists, both local and international, but also in terms of spreading knowledge about the importance of protecting the environment. At the same time, the destinations are also contributing to their communities economically and providing a rare environment for research for a wide range of scientific fields.

The information provided on some of the destinations' websites reveals the shared view that protecting the rainforests results in communal benefits. Regarding the first research question about the role of sustainability on the websites, it seems that contributing to the local communities is a remarkable part of the destinations' operation, while also contributing to the environmental sustainability of the destinations. For instance, the Canopy Treehouses and Wildlife Sanctuary seems to focus on the Tablelands as a community and uses their platform to inform the reader about a few local businesses that the tourist might be interested in. Thus, it seems that many of the destinations expand their promotion to cover a wider area instead of limiting the focus on the destination specifically, which not only contributes to the wellbeing of the wider community but also might take some of the pressure off of the immediate surroundings of the main attraction. Moreover, the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve, for instance, participates in and has established many programmes that provide activities for the locals and develop the environmental education of the young people of Costa Rica, to name a few examples. By partaking in the wellbeing of the local communities through these programmes, the destinations are helping the communities to grow and develop more sustainably.

According to Sowards (2012), the tourists tend to look for a counterexperience, an experience or environment that is the opposite of what they are used to at home. Ecotourism destinations, in particular, often seem to present nature as their main attraction, and as the destinations surrounded by rainforests are exotic and entirely different from the urban surroundings for a significant number of tourists, the ecotourism destinations examined in this thesis seem like a suitable match for the tourists in search for the aforementioned counterexperience. However, because of the number of rainforest destinations, the destinations need to find characteristics that differentiate and distinguish them from the others. These characteristics may be unique to the specific destination, as the climatic conditions in the Monteverde Cloud Forest, for instance, or the destination might simply choose to emphasise a shared characteristic more than other similar destinations, which is what the Daintree Wilderness Lodge does by highlighting the environmental setting by calling a stay at the lodge a *true rainforest experience*. Whichever the strategy, the goal is to make the particular destination more attractive in the eyes of the tourists than the others located in similar environments.

Ecolinguistics studies the use of language and vocabulary in the context of environmental issues and ecology (Dash, 2019). That is, it encourages sustainable practices and explores the ways in which language may be used to influence pro-environmental behaviour. While studying the ecotourism destinations' websites and other promotional materials benefits the tourism industry, it is also significant to the study of linguistics. The promotional materials of tourism destinations provide excellent material for ecolinguistics. Ecotourism destinations, in particular, aim to influence sustainable behaviour in their visitors, so their websites should be well thought out to have the possibility of achieving this goal already through mental tourism. Previous studies have shown that tourism starts with mental representations (see e.g., Mahadi et al., 2011), which is why it is important to examine how the destinations can use language as a means to influence more sustainable decisions in the tourists' travelling behaviour. This is a valuable way for the tourism industry to develop their operation to match the expectations of tourists to avoid disappointment, as well as to encourage more sustainable travel alternatives. The destinations' approaches to influencing the tourists' behaviour seem to be rather subtle, as the ecotourism destinations tend to lead with emotion and example to make ecological alternatives more easily approachable for the tourists.

The scope of this thesis was small, enabling a qualitative analysis of a few selected rainforest destinations. While the promotional material provides suitable material for research, it should be noted that websites, especially, are quick and easy to update, which might present difficulties for analysis. Some of the websites examined in this thesis were updated a few times during the writing process, although the majority of the content stayed the same throughout. However, in-depth studies on ecotourism destinations would help develop the destinations further, which in turn might lead to even more sustainable alternatives while also influencing other organisations to make similar changes in their operations, eventually hopefully making sustainability the norm in the industry.

Research on the promotional materials, particularly websites, is still rather scarce. Similar studies conducted on the destinations' websites with a larger sample size would allow for a more generalised view on how unified the construction of tourism destinations' websites and the linguistic and visual elements utilised on them actually are. Moreover, it would be interesting to take the linguistic analysis further by attempting to find out whether the vocabulary and different emphases made on the websites, which have a purpose in theory, manage to become reality by having an effect on the decisions and actions of the tourists.

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